

## Speaking Notes for EP Round Table in Fukuoka, 25 July 2014

Thomas Christiansen, *Maastricht University*

### 1. Was it really different this time?

- formal EP campaign to get the vote out
- focused on new powers under Lisbon Treaty re Commission President election
- first time major parties nominated *Spitzenkandidaten* for the Commission post
- different also due to the impact of the Eurozone crisis
- focus on raising turnout which stagnated but at least did not continue to slide
- novelty of election campaign and aftermath is a fundamental change to previous experience
- outcome (rising vote for anti-European and Eurosceptic parties) could actually have a paradoxical effect (closer cooperation between pro-integrationist parties and between supranational institutions), promising “more of the same”

### 2. Was the 2014 Election actually an “Electoral Earthquake”?

- Eurosceptic parties such as UKIP, FN, M5S and AFD have nothing in common with each other
- loss of votes for some Eurosceptic parties (PVV, CSU)
- right wing populists (Le Pen, Wilders) actually failed to set up a new group in the parliament
- responses more to national rather than pan-European dynamics
- lack of a constructive agenda for reforming EU
- are they against EU? Against past EU policy? Against the Euro?
- very large majority still in favour of EU integration, both electorally and in the EP
- (lack of) turnout cuts both ways: low turnout also indicates absence of grievances with Europe

### 3. Some observations on agency and structure

- structural changes matter (e.g. minor change in treaty wording)
- the role of Schulz in creating a novel dynamic
- the contingency of Juncker being available for the EPP
- has fundamentally changed an important aspect of EU politics – Spitzenkandidaten are here to stay
- debates boring but mainly because the other side (FN, PVV, UKIP, Con) did not decide to stand

### 4. Will there be new politics inside the EP?

- more fragmented but clear majority still possible
- eurosceptics/anti-europeans hardly a common front
- EP passes early test of its resolve vis-à-vis European Council
- EP politics will not become more left/right – there is no majority on either side
- grand coalition inevitable, may even be stronger than before
  - now based on formal agreement

- had only 36 hours to agree a common position on a Commission president candidate
- won the 'race' with the European Council on naming the preferred candidate
- individual legislation might be more difficult to pass, but no danger of generalised blockage

#### 5. Changes in inter-institutional relations?

- Commission might be silent winner
  - more legitimate, capable and assertive President
  - prospects for a more stable majority in the EP
- interesting question whether the generally EP will be weaker or stronger
  - pro: fragmented EP might be able to extract more from MS (e.g. TTIP)
  - contra: inexperienced, uninterested and ignorant MEPs might negotiate badly with Commission and Council
- likely that Council will be confronted by more stable cooperation between EP and Commission

#### 6. Intergovernmental Perspective: Prospects for a more 'German EU'

- in the European Council: Merkel strengthened vis-à-vis other leaders of larger member states
- generally EU becoming more parliamentarised in the German mould
- in the EU: coalition politics are the order of the day
  - Schulz continuing as EP President
  - Grand coalition in EP matching grand coalition in Germany
  - CDU more important inside the EPP
  - SPD more important inside the S&D